

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

(29) M-588

Memorandum of Conversation

762.00/3-459

DATE: March 4, 1959

SUBJECT: Replies to Soviet Note

MAR 9 1959

PARTICIPANTS: Ambassador Caccia, British Ambassador
Lord Hood, Minister, British Embassy

Mr. Merchant, Assistant Secretary, EUR
Mr. Dale, Deputy Director, BNA

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In answer to Sir Harold's request for comments on the Soviet note of March 2, Mr. Merchant pointed out that, after the insulting initial portions, it showed signs of a possible increase in flexibility in conditionally accepting a Foreign Minister's meeting and in mentioning a conference of two or three months' duration which could be intended to fuzz the May 27 deadline. He stressed the speculative nature of these observations, however. Sir Harold gave the British view that the note had been written before Prime Minister Macmillan's trip and had been altered to introduce a note of flexibility as a result of his efforts. Mr. Merchant stated that we could probably deal with the Russian suggestions as to composition of the conference (inclusion of Poland and Czechoslovakia) but that we could not possibly accept their proposals for an agenda. Sir Harold commented that the Soviets now have a fixed position that they will no longer accept the old three to one ratio in dealing with the West and must have parity. He asked where our side stood on this, particularly the Italians. Mr. Merchant replied that we had not yet talked with the Italians but should we continue to add participants we would soon have all the NATO Pact countries facing the Warsaw Pact nations.

Lord Hood commented that the USSR should be willing to talk about our ideas on an agenda since they have already been pressing us for proposals and he asked about a German peace treaty. Mr. Merchant replied that the State Department actually has three draft peace treaties: one written in 1955 at the time

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of the Foreign Ministers Conference, another which is a short version on the Japanese model, and most recently an amendment of the Soviet draft treaty. He said that at his level we are thinking of promoting the peace treaty question to a more prominent position in negotiations than it occupied at Geneva but added that we still cannot accept the right of the Soviets to dictate the subjects to be discussed. He noted that the Soviets do not allow for taking up German reunification at either a Foreign Ministers or Heads of State Conference.

Sir Harold wondered how we could put forth a draft peace treaty without prejudging German unification. Mr. Merchant commented that our present drafts are so general that whereas they assume the existence of a unified Germany, it would be difficult to spell out the reunification process. Sir Harold returned to the point wondering whether we could discuss such matters as European security without a prior agreement on German unification.

He then asked how we expected to deal procedurally in preparing an answer to the note. Mr. Merchant said that we hoped the four Western countries could exchange drafts very shortly without waiting for the quadripartite working group to meet. He said that we are now taking our first cut at a draft note which we will pass on as soon as possible to the other three countries concerned. He thought the quadripartite group had quite enough to do without trying to prepare a reply to the Soviets, but he did see a possible role for it as a point of final coordination. Sir Harold said that his Embassy has as yet no indication as to British views on this matter.

In discussion of the duration of a possible Foreign Ministers Conference, Mr. Merchant speculated that perhaps the Russians would like to have us meet at the very time they turn East Germany over to the East German Communist regime. Lord Hood expressed belief that the Soviets actually do not want a Foreign Ministers meeting to last too long but Mr. Merchant commented that they would not then have mentioned two or three months which is longer than any previous meeting at that level with the Russians.

Mr. Merchant then reported Couve de Murville's views on the note, just received from our Embassy in Paris, to the effect that the Russian note is menacing and actually threatens general war. The main problem, as Couve sees it, is the agenda which in the Soviet version is completely unacceptable. He is not inclined to stick on the question of including the Poles and Czechoslovakians and suggests that a sub-group of the quadripartite working group consider a Western reply.

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